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ABSTRACT

The role of language alternation, or code-switching, in the bilingual classroom can be used as a teaching and learning strategy. Code-switching is simply a recognition of the fact that more than one language can define events and persons. Not all forms of code-switching are regarded as acceptable in the bilingual classroom. Language alternation in bilingual classrooms must be meaningful in itself and not simply reflect a language choice. A teacher who is bilingual has intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior that can be instrumental in constructing a sociolinguistic profile of the student in the bilingual classroom. With this knowledge, the teacher can determine (1) what is being switched and how it is being switched; (2) whether a student is mixing or alternating languages in a manner that communicates confusion; and (3) criteria for separating meaningful from meaningless code-switching. Based on these discoveries, the teacher can structure classroom behavior more effectively. (MSE)

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Code-Switching, Intuitive Knowledge, and the Bilingual Classroom*

Adalberto Aguirre, Jr.

This paper discusses the role of language alternation, or code-switching, in the bilingual classroom as a learning and teaching strategy. Particular focus is on the conceptual complexity surrounding the definition of code-switching in the bilingual classroom, and on the association between code-switching and intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior. The principal assertion in this paper is that a bilingual teacher's intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior can be instrumental in his or her construction of a sociolinguistic profile for the student in the bilingual classroom.

Most explanations of social behavior by persons in everyday life are not the products of explicit mental models or coherent theoretical substructures, according to diSessa (1983). As much as one would like to believe that social explanation in everyday life is the product of a calculative and contrastive analysis, social explanation is primarily a cognitive process based on elements in commonsense observation. For example, persons often depend on feelings ("Something doesn't seem right . . . . It doesn't feel right") or perceptions ("It doesn't look right . . . Something looks out of place") to construct explanations that fit their observations. As organizing principles in the explanation of everyday life, elements in commonsense observation, such as feeling and perception, enable persons to gather their observations into meaningful categories.

*A version of this paper was presented at the invitational conference on the Mediation of Technology at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, in November 1985. Much of this paper is derived from my lengthy discussions with Eduardo Hernandez-Chávez during his tenure at Stanford University. The comments I received from Dennis Bixler and Ray Padilla smoothed out the rough edges. Any shortcomings, however, are my own.

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THE OBSERVATION OF ALTERNATION

A question teachers of bilingual children in bilingual classrooms often ask is, "What does it mean when bilingual children alternate languages in ongoing discourse?" The question is in response to the observation that bilingual children do alternate or switch their two languages in the same sentence or utterance. Secondly, the question is produced by interpreting the observation to mean that language alternation is meaningful to the bilingual speakers involved in the social interaction. There are at least two types of working explanations for the phenomenon one can construct: (1) language alternation in bilingual children's discourse demonstrates their speaking knowledge of two languages, and (2) language alternation in bilingual children's discourse indicates that the speakers possess a sociolinguistic competency that permits them to alternate languages in a meaningful and communicative manner (Aguirre, 1985).

Given that language alternation is a sociolinguistic feature in the discourse of bilingual speakers, how may teachers construct working explanations for language alternation that will enable them to understand what the alternation means, and what it communicates about a bilingual child's sociolinguistic behavior? My purpose in the following pages is to examine language alternation in bilingual speech and its utility to teachers of bilingual children in bilingual education classrooms. That is, this paper focuses on the use of language alternation, or code-switching, as a teaching and learning strategy in the bilingual classroom, and on the association of code-switching with a teacher's intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior. Thus, I intend to demonstrate that intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior is both appropriate and essential for evaluating the sociolinguistic events that produce questions about bilingual behavior that are often assumed to be unanswerable or unworkable.

CODE-SWITCHING

Code-switching is a term used to describe those speech situations in which (a) speakers alternate between two or more languages, varieties of language, or speech styles; (b) speakers alternate between two different language codes within the same discourse, which implies that the speakers are aware of the switch; or (c) speakers alternate between two different language systems because of the environment (for instance, the presence of

a speech partner with whom the speaker prefers to speak in the other language) or topic of discussion (Hymes, 1974; Lance, 1970; St. Clair & Valdés, 1980).

A general survey of the code-switching literature reveals that one can identify two major concerns. On the one hand, a focus on the social uses of code-switching has resulted in analyses of the rules for speaking, or communicative competence, for bilingual speakers (Denison, 1968; Lipski, 1980; Valdés, 1980). These rules for speaking are examined by observing the participation of bilingual speakers in social events that require linguistic interaction. By noting the association between rules for speaking and ongoing social interaction, the observer can outline the process by which speakers select the appropriate code (language), and can understand how code selection contributes to the maintenance of the social context. As a result, one can observe the contextualization of social interaction. For example, a social dimension such as *social distance* can affect code selection; the choice of Haitian French or Creole in Haiti marks role shifts within a social event.

Concern with the linguistic features of code-switching also has led researchers to examine those linguistic environments in which code-switching occurs (Pfaff, 1979; Sridhar & Sridhar, 1980; Valdés-Fallis, 1976). By uncovering linguistic regularity in the production of code-switching, studies of linguistic environment attempt to demonstrate that bilingual speakers possess subsets of grammatical knowledge that permit the ordered alternation of languages. For example, among English/Spanish bilingual Mexican-American speakers in California, adverbial constructions may be switched: "Vamos next week," but not as interrogatives, "When vamos?"; a switch may occur at a noun phrase only after a determiner: "Se lo di a mi grandfather," but not as, "Se lo di a my grandfather"; an adverb may be switched before an adjective: "Es very friendly," but not, "Es very amistoso" (Gumperz & Hernández-Chávez, 1970).

Code-switching is then an instrumental activity in constructing and maintaining bilingual social interaction, and it indicates the operation of an ordered linguistic process that facilitates bilingual communication. Code-switching is not random linguistic production, in the sense that it is only speech mixture, but rather is the product of ordered linguistic selection. It follows, then, that code-switching is not an indication that a bilingual speaker is linguistically incongruent with ongoing social interac-

tion; it is instead an active process of negotiation that ensures a high degree of linguistic and social congruence within a given context (Aguirre, 1978; Miller, 1984).

CODE-SWITCHING IN THE BILINGUAL CLASSROOM

Even though code-switching has attracted a considerable amount of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic interest, its role in the bilingual classroom as a teaching and learning strategy has been subjected to only limited attention. Although teachers in bilingual classrooms readily admit the presence of code-switching in classroom discourse among bilingual children (Aguirre, 1984), researchers have been very cautious in describing the role of code-switching in bilingual classroom structure and activity. This caution may be due in part to a concern shared by researchers that code-switching should not be used as a language-assessment device that could result in a mismatch between bilingual discourse and bilingual behavior (see Hudelson, 1983 and Huerta-Macías, 1983 for interesting examples).

The study of code-switching as a classroom teaching and learning strategy has been plagued with problems that stem from the conceptual complexity of the description of what type of code-switching is most productive in the bilingual classroom. For instance, while Jacobson (1975, 1979) is a leading supporter of code-switching as a teaching strategy in the bilingual classroom, he is careful to point out that his concern is only with *intersentential* code-switching (that is, the alternation of both languages in separate and independent utterances that reinforce the sociolinguistic knowledge the speaker possesses for each language). According to Jacobson (1981), any use of intersentential code-switching in the bilingual classroom should be done with the following concerns in mind:

1. The extent to which the native language must be developed in order for the learner to succeed in learning a second language;
2. The extent to which the home language should be used in school in order to develop positive attitudes toward it;
3. The extent to which first language maintenance in the primary grades will not interfere with the transition to English in postprimary education;
4. The extent to which the use of both languages would lead to an understanding of the bilingual functioning of some sectors in our society; and

5. The extent to which school subjects could be learned through two language media.

In a similar, yet competing, viewpoint, González (1972) has argued against the use of code-switching in bilingual classrooms. Underlying González's viewpoint are the observations that:

1. Children can learn a second language while maintaining their first language, but allowing code-switching deprives the child of the opportunity to practice using the two languages as separate modes of communication;
2. Code-switching in the bilingual classroom encourages the student to use the stronger language (usually English) rather than attempting new linguistic expressions in the weaker language; and
3. The use of code-switching prevents the teacher from identifying language areas in need of remediation.

In a reformulated view that merges closely with Jacobson's stance, González & Maez (1980) argued that: "Code-switching of the intersentential type can and should be used in teaching, while intrasentential code-switching should be accepted (as should any variety of language the child brings with him) but should not be used by the teacher. In addition, the teacher should assure that when the child does engage in intrasentential code-switching, the word switched to English is in his repertoire" (p. 133). Code-switching then is regarded as a valuable tool in the bilingual classroom when it occurs in separate and independent linguistic events. In contrast, code-switching that occurs within the same linguistic event (intrasentential), while regarded as a sociolinguistic feature in bilingual speech, is viewed as an impediment to the development of independent bilingual language use. Thus the concern is not so much with the presence or occurrence of code-switching in the bilingual classroom as it is with the form it assumes.

While the preceding viewpoints are by no means exhaustive in describing the role of code-switching in the bilingual classroom, they are representative of the principal conceptual issues surrounding the use of code-switching as a teaching strategy. One must note that the presence of code-switching in the bilingual classroom is both obvious and unavoidable. Placing the pedagogical issues aside, teachers in bilingual classrooms encounter code-switching in their students' discourse at both the intrasentential and intersentential levels. It is necessary that teachers in these

situations regard code-switching as a communicative strategy. By doing so, teachers in bilingual education classrooms may be able to use their intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior to construct a sociolinguistic profile of a bilingual student.

INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned previously, social explanation in everyday life is based on elements in commonsense observation. As a cumulative strategy in the development of simple knowledge structures, principles of commonsense observation make it possible for persons to develop a base of intuitive knowledge that reflects their own life experiences. This base of intuitive knowledge is used to infuse order into the meaning of everyday life. For example, simple knowledge structures for global categories such as sex, class, or race enable persons to observe, in an ordered manner, the social behavior of persons possessing one or more of these global characteristics. The cumulative effect of these global characteristics results in the construction of structured relationships among global categories. The construction of structured relationships, in turn, facilitates the formulation of expectations for interpreting everyday life. Thus persons experience order in their everyday lives if people and events are experienced as expected (Aguirre, 1981; Boulding, 1981).

Secondly, this base of intuitive knowledge allows persons to observe and order their observations across a variety and number of social contexts. Within any one social context, people observe ongoing social activity both from a variety of perspectives, and one that is specific to their own interpretations of self in everyday life. It seems reasonable to state, then, that a person's explanation for his or her observations will exhibit varying degrees of understanding given the person's own interpretation of self. That is, the closer the approximation between an observation and a person's base of intuitive knowledge, the higher the degree of social understanding reflected in the interpretation of the ongoing social activity. Conversely, as approximation between an observation and intuitive knowledge decreases, the degree of social understanding decreases.

Although the notion of intuitive knowledge is at great variance with philosophical or phenomenological notions, it focuses on only one feature: understanding. Where an epistemologist may focus on intuitive knowledge as a mode of evidence, I am more concerned with the role intuitive knowledge plays in developing

levels of social understanding. Such a characterization of intuitive knowledge is also one that is limited to use in the bilingual classroom. Similar to the viewpoint expressed by Noddings and Shore (1984) regarding the general use of intuitive modes in education, this paper considers how intuitive knowledge may contribute to the teaching of bilingual children and how such teaching may enhance intuitive capacities.

A METATHEORETICAL APPROACH

We have already noted that bilingual speakers are able to alternate languages in a manner reflecting a process of ordered selection. Let us assume that this process of ordered selection is dependent on a bilingual speaker's base of intuitive knowledge for bilingual behavior. Let us further assume that this base of intuitive knowledge expands in correspondence with a bilingual speaker's ability to approach a state of balance for his or her language use. A prerequisite, however, for approaching a state of balance is active participation in bilingual contexts. Thus a bilingual speaker's base of intuitive knowledge for bilingual behavior will expand in correspondence with his or her degree of balance in language use and participation in bilingual contexts. As a result, simply speaking two languages is not sufficient to permit the development of a base of intuitive knowledge for bilingual behavior (see De Avila, 1987; Pfaff, 1987).

We must assume that teachers in bilingual classrooms are bilingual and proficient in the languages their students speak. For teachers in bilingual classrooms not to be bilingual would render both the classroom and its interactive behavior meaningless. Although the organizational features of the classroom would impose some order into classroom behavior, both student and teacher would be operating within contexts of ambiguous interpretation. In other words, in order to establish a relative degree of understanding for carrying out classroom lessons, there must be a high level of correspondence between a teacher's and a student's base of intuitive knowledge (for example, see Heath, 1985, and Rodríguez, 1985).

Assuming that all of the preceding assumptions are operative in the everyday life of the bilingual classroom, how, then, can a bilingual teacher use intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior to enhance learning and teaching activities for bilingual children? The following observations are reflective, rather than inclusive, of what is possible.

First, the bilingual teacher in the bilingual classroom can listen to a student's code-switching in order to identify *what* is being switched and *how* it is being switched, such as word repetition across languages. If a teacher's intuitive knowledge tells him or her that the child possesses similar linguistic ability in each language, then the teacher may want to alternate languages with the student in order to build on sentence compelxity and word power. In turn, the student's base of intuitive knowledge for bilingual behavior is enhanced. As a result, both teacher and student increase their levels of understanding regarding ongoing social activity.

Second, the bilingual teacher's intuitive knowledge may tell him or her that a bilingual student is mixing, rather than alternating, languages, in a manner that communicates confusion. For example, the language mixture might be incongruent with what is socially and linguistically possible within the context. The teacher can then use his or her own intuitive knowledge to interpret the observation in order to separate language confusion from language learning problems. The teacher can then employ code-switching as a strategy to teach the student how to transfer concepts, and their linguistic symbols, from one language to another (Tsang, 1983). The goal is to use code-switching to develop a student's linguistic knowledge for two separate symbols and their appropriate meanings.

Third, the bilingual teacher can employ intuitive knowledge of code-switching to develop criteria for separating meaningful from meaningless code-switching. That is, the bilingual teacher can distinguish those speakers whose code-switching is reflective of participation in bilingual contexts from those speakers who have learned how to code-switch as part of social activity, such as in language play as a process of group identity (see Gumperz & Hernández-Chávez, 1970). The former are usually proficient bilinguals, while the latter are limited in their use of both languages. The implication, of course, is that not all persons who code-switch are bilingual speakers. The teacher can develop sets of classroom lessons that are bilingual in goals and can encourage reinforcement outside of the classroom (Ornstein, 1982).

The preceding observations are only those associated with the use of intuitive knowledge for code-switching by bilingual teachers with bilingual students in bilingual classrooms. The attractiveness of the approach discussed in this paper is that it

takes into consideration the limited time available to teachers for making lengthy evaluations of students' language abilities and needs. Second, by using their own intuitive knowledge, teachers are in a better position to structure classroom behavior in correspondence with the span of bilingual abilities generated by students in the classroom. Third, this approach enables the bilingual teacher to construct a sociolinguistic profile for a bilingual student given the teacher's intuitive knowledge of social and linguistic features in bilingual behavior. Thus the product would be a sociolinguistic profile highlighting global, rather than particularistic, features in a student's bilingual behavior. Because the process of education is, in general, oriented toward students' global rather than particularistic learning features, such an approach is compatible with what is both possible and probable in the school classroom.

SUMMARY

The controversy will no doubt continue as to what role code-switching should play in the bilingual classroom. It is worth noting that regardless of the view one holds, code-switching is a reflection of sociolinguistic negotiation in everyday bilingual behavior. The presence of code-switching is simply a recognition of the fact that more than one language is capable of defining events and persons.

It is also worth noting that not all forms of code-switching are regarded as acceptable in the bilingual classroom. Intersentential code-switching is generally accepted as the most effective in the bilingual classroom because it provides for the development of language compartmentalization. That is, language alternation in bilingual classrooms must be meaningful in itself and not simply reflect a language choice. The alternation must communicate meaning and be linked to co-occurring features in the social context.

Finally, the primary obstacle to the metatheoretical approach outlined in this paper stems from one of the many dilemmas faced by bilingual education: many teachers in bilingual education classrooms are not proficient bilinguals, and many of those who are proficient bilinguals do not necessarily speak the same non-English language as their students speak (Aguirre, 1986). The bilingual student is at risk in these classroom situations because the teacher is unable to comprehend the manner in which the student is negotiating his or her social and

linguistic identity. A teacher's limited comprehension of bilingual behavior results in the identification of learning problems that are assumed to be reflective of language problems, but that are not reflective of a student's language learning needs. The unavoidable outcome is that classroom structure becomes a barrier to sociolinguistic interaction and exchange between teacher and student.

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